

DDI-388-70

Executive Registry

70-648

6 February 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : OSS Records

1. This memorandum is for your information and is in response to your request regarding the status and availability of the "OSS Archives".

2. The "OSS Archives" include the records of OSS, its predecessor, the Office of the Coordinator of Information, and its successor, the Strategic Services Unit (SSU). These records contain between 10 million and 14 million pages of material and are located in CIA, the National Archives, and the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park, New York. In addition, the CIA Central Reference Service holds 143 OSS films on countries, training, operations, and the like. Access to these records is controlled by CIA alone or jointly with the National Archives. Tab A presents a more detailed summary of the location, volume, type of record, and control of access.

3. The OSS materials are still being used in the Agency. In 1957 we started a systematic review of the OSS records and have selected and duplicated a small percentage of these documents for inclusion in the Clandestine Service Record System. The OSS records are used for processing about [REDACTED] queries a week, for some of the current CIA historical program on bases and stations overseas, and for operational and counterintelligence purposes. For example, we are still using 201 files on China which were begun in OSS days and continued through SSU and CIG to the present. These records are also used to certify creditable

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OSS service for both US citizens and foreign nationals, to respond to requests for information from individuals formerly associated with the predecessor organizations, to answer unclassified inquiries from the general public, and to settle claims from heirs or relatives of former OSS agents.

4. Although well controlled and indexed for our current uses, the OSS material is very poorly organized for historical research. The TOP SECRET papers have been separated from those of lower classification and have been filed by TS number. Other than that, the papers are in no discernable order. The primary breakdown of materials of lower classification is organizational. For example, the files of the London Station are stored in one group of boxes. Within these boxes the files are essentially in the same order and contain the same papers as when the last operating unit had them. Since there was no standard filing system, the order and titles of files of any one component bears little resemblance to that of any other.

5. Before these records could be released they would have to be screened by officers who are aware of the currently useful and classified information in them. Although I have not been able to get an estimate of the number of manhours involved in screening a box of these records, it is clear that meaningful access even by cleared outside scholars would require so much preliminary screening by CIA personnel as to be out of the question for the foreseeable future.

6. The vast majority of the papers would be of no historical interest to a scholar, and even if he were given completely free access, the sheer volume of the materials that would have to be searched before finding anything of historical significance would be overwhelming. The problem would be more manageable if the topic were limited to a single organizational unit or operation, and if the researcher was directly familiar with the material under consideration or had the help of someone who was.

7. From time to time access to OSS records and information has been granted authors and former OSS personnel to publish unclassified articles and books. Tab B summarizes some of the

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more important of these instances. Occasionally, students and scholars request information on OSS from the National Archives and the Department of the Army. When possible, these requests are honored with the approval of CIA.

8. There are some legal aspects of the problem of control and access to these records worth noting. One deals with the Freedom of Information Act which raises certain questions about the accessibility by private individuals to some of the OSS records. Another is our responsibility to preserve all of these documents under the statutes on archival material. In addition, there has been some question about the legal title to the OSS materials now in our custody. These topics are covered more fully in Tab C.

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EDWARD W. PROCTOR

Assistant Deputy Director for Intelligence

Attachments:

- Tab A - OSS Archives (location, volume, type, access control)
- Tab B - Summary of Release of OSS Records
- Tab C - Legal and Policy Aspects

cc: D/DCI/NIPE w/atts.

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